

Romans 15:1-6

Many Christians desire unity in the church. Whilst there is a significant degree of unity in doctrinal belief in Reformed Churches, there is often a lack of unity when it comes to opinions about the way we should live the Christian life.

Within some churches, there are subcultures organized around various positions.

There is often a desire to achieve unity around these specific distinctives.

What is the basis of unity within the body of Christ?

Summary

In Romans 15:1-6, Paul addresses the fundamental question: What is the basis of unity within the body of Christ?

1. Significant Responsibility vv. 1-3

With great faith comes great responsibility. God gives the strong greater faith not for their own personal benefit but for the mutual benefit of the church (**15:1-2**). God has given the strong great faith so that they can carry the weak. Christ, who was strong, took upon Himself our weakness so that He might save us, who were weak (**5:6**).

Paul employs the language of strong and weak to remind the believers at Rome that the life of Christ was supposed to be manifest in them; the strong were supposed to lay down their lives for the weak. He points to Christ, who did not seek His own interests but sought the interests of others, particularly in their salvation (**Rom 15:3**). The apostle cites **Psalms 69:9**. It was Christ's zeal for God's house, His body, that was the foundation of His willingness to undergo humiliation. If zeal truly consumes the strong, then they will be more than willing to care for their weaker brothers.

2. Pastoral Prayer vv. 5-6

As a faithful pastor and under-shepherd, Paul also prayed for the church in Rome so that they would embrace the truths he was teaching them (**Rom. 15:5-6**).

The apostle knew of the importance and power of prayer and so he prayed for God's working regarding the church's lack of unity. He relied not on his ability to persuade but on Christ's power to save and transform the church.

Paul prayed that the Christians in Rome would "live in harmony with one another" (**15:5**). This is not to say that they would agree on everything (**Rom 14**). Nevertheless, in the midst of their disagreements over matters of opinion, they were not to dispute and censure one another but they were to pursue the righteousness of

the kingdom of God. The harmony comes not in the strong coercing the weak to 'get with the program', but in pursuing the building up of the body of Christ. It comes in the strong forbearing with the scruples of the weak, the weak growing in their faith, and in both groups refusing to judge one another censoriously. The ultimate goal of Paul's prayer is that God would conform the Roman Christians to the image of Christ.

3. Church Unity

Unity is not built on debatable opinions and distinctive. Unity is built only on Jesus Christ in spite of our differing opinions. The church will never achieve any semblance of unity unless it is centered on Jesus Christ.

Zeal for the church's building up will consume the person who truly understands the basis of the church's unity. The one who is passionate for the house of God, the church, will unhesitatingly forgo the advocacy of any distinctive for the sake of the weaker brother. Just as Christ sacrificed Himself for the church, so we must be willing to sacrifice our desires for the church.

No substantial degree of unity results from rallying around preferences. Nor does any substantial degree of unity result if we all just sacrifice our desires and opinions. We must live according to the Spirit and pursue unity in His power. How do we ensure that we pursue unity according to the Spirit? First, draw near to God in prayer. Secondly, he drew near to God through His Word. If we bear the image of Christ, we will participate in that divinely wrought unity.

Who is the basis of unity within the church? Jesus Christ.
 What is the mark of a person who understands this basis?
 A zeal for the house of God, the church, the final temple.
 Who is the source of unity within the body of Christ? The triune God alone through His appointed means of grace: Word, sacraments, and prayer.

Pursue unity through Jesus Christ.
 Pray that Christ would give you a sacrificial zeal for the church.
 Pursue greater conformity to the image of Christ by drawing nigh unto God through the means of grace.
 Do all these things to the glory of God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.